

Tensions at the Gold Ridge mine, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

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The takeover of the Gold Ridge mine by Guadalcanal militants in June 2000 followed two years of civil conflict largely involving groups from the islands of Malaita and Guadalcanal, resulting in the evacuation of Malaitans from the mine area. This article traces the history of the conflict around the mine site and explores the underlying reasons for the takeover of the mine. Two rationales for the takeover are advanced: the securing of weapons and other materials to support the conflict, and ideological opposition to resource extraction, particularly gold mining. Resource-related grievances rather than greed provide the main explanation for the takeover and looting. Key concerns registered against the mine include a lack of jobs for locals and regional disappointment over the distribution of the mine's revenue.

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From 1998 to 2003, Solomon Islands was the scene of civil conflict. The period was marked by lawlessness and disorder primarily connected to indigenous groups from the neighbouring islands of Malaita and Guadalcanal. The conflict was confined largely to the capital, Honiara, and parts of rural Guadalcanal—the largest island in the archipelago. The northern plains area and central Guadalcanal, including the area accommodating a foreign-owned open-pit goldmine, Gold Ridge, witnessed extensive fighting involving armed militants, police and civilians. Gold Ridge mine was in

operation for 22 months from August 1998. During that period, it produced 210,000 ounces of gold and was the source of 30 per cent of the country's GDP (Nanau 2009:190).

This article draws on the available literature and interviews with various protagonists to explore tensions at the Gold Ridge mine,¹ focusing primarily on the conflict that took place at the mine site from 1998 to 2003. It discusses the extent to which the mine was both a cause and a target of the fighting that took place there and the Guadalcanal uprising more



broadly. The article also looks briefly at the mine's current operations and some of the broader concerns—both historical and contemporary—that have been registered in relation to the mine.

A looming crisis: 1998 to June 2000

In February 1998, the Guadalcanal Premier, Ezekiel Alebua, on behalf of the Guadalcanal Provincial Assembly, submitted to the Solomon Islands government its 'Demands by the bona fide and indigenous people of Guadalcanal' (Guadalcanal Provincial Assembly 1999). Included was a call 'that 50% of revenue generated through investments within the Guadalcanal Province that is collected by Government in the forms of taxes, levies, license fees etc. be paid to the Province'.

This demand was part of a raft of requests, the principal one being a claim for greater autonomy through a system of state government. The demand reflected a belief that investment and development on Guadalcanal were disproportionately supporting the rest of the country at the expense of the island's indigenous inhabitants. It was this particular grievance that was to play the dominant role in shaping the views of many Guadalcanal militants involved in the fighting at the mine.

One of the first tangible demonstrations that Gold Ridge could become a site of conflict was the stationing of Police Field Force (PFF) and Rapid Response Unit (RRU) officers at the mine in 1998. The PFF—the feared paramilitary wing of the Royal Solomon Islands Police (RSIP)—comprised mainly Malaitan police officers. Cultural differences characterised Malaitan–Guadalcanal relations. The police presence—at the request of the mine—was intended to provide security; however, until May 2000, the deployment was to be a continuing cause of tension,

both with local villages and with Guadalcanal militants.

A feature of village life at Gold Ridge in the late 1990s was the presence of a large Malaitan population. Malaitans made up the majority of the 400-strong mine workforce ('Gold mine boss checks Guadalcanal security', *Asia Pulse*, 22 June 1999) and many Malaitans had married into local communities.²

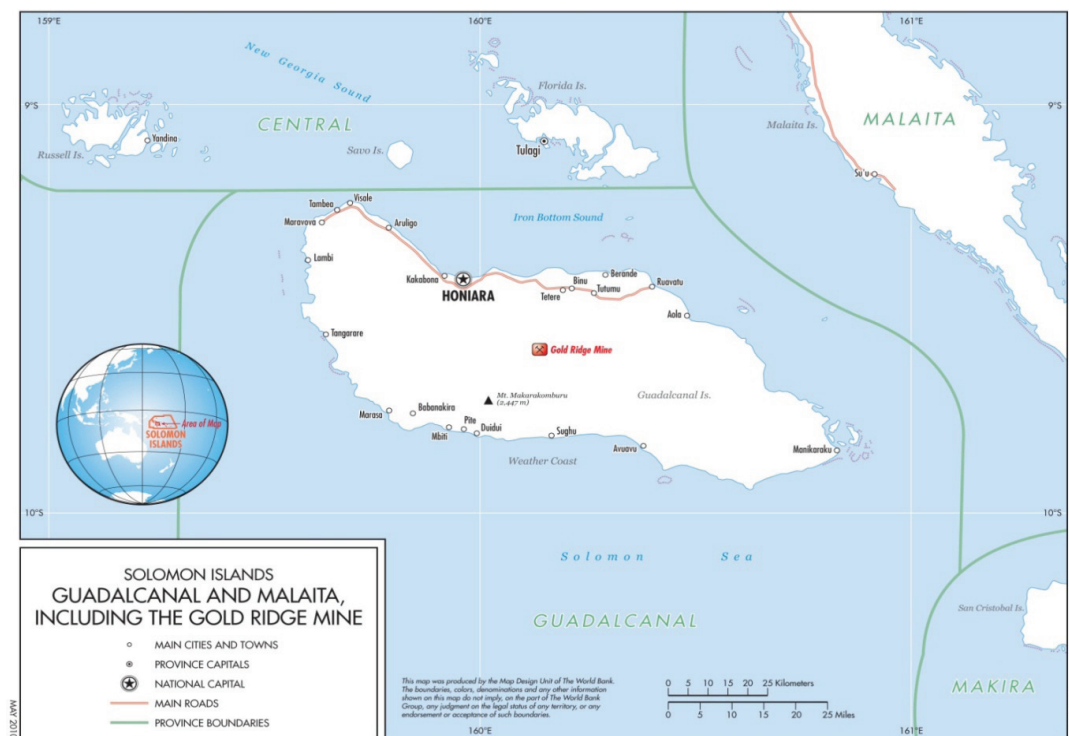
A dominant Malaitan reading of the conflict that engulfed Solomon Islands is that Malaitans disproportionately contributed to the economic development of Guadalcanal and Honiara. This is part of a deeper ethno-narrative of Malaitans as an undervalued, and even reviled, working class who were the key builders of Solomon Islands (Allen 2007:165). This view as it relates to Gold Ridge is encapsulated in the writings of Malaitan chief Michael Kwa'iola

Those who do nothing, expecting things to come to them without work and sweat can become jealous. That is one cause of the conflict. They should appreciate that Malaitans were the productive, active people who did everything in Guadalcanal...It was Malaitans who worked for the mining company at Gold Ridge, operating the machines and earning revenue for the government and royalties for the Guadalcanal people from their land. (Kwa'iola and Burt 2007:115)

In May 1999, Guadalcanal militants, fighting under the banner of the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM), began evicting settlers across Guadalcanal, starting in west Guadalcanal and then on the plains to the east of Honiara. Waves of mainly Malaitan refugees left their homes, bound for the capital, including Malaitans living around Gold Ridge. In total, approximately 24,000 settlers had been evicted from rural Guadalcanal by November 1999 (Fraenkel 2004:61).



Figure 1 Map of Guadalcanal and Malaita, including the Gold Ridge mine site



Source: World Bank, n.d. *Solomon Islands: Guadalcanal and Malaita, including the Gold Ridge mine*, Printing, Graphics & Map Design, General Services Department, The World Bank, Washington, DC.

From mid 1999 until about mid 2000, Gold Ridge was to be the scene of continuing conflict between the mainly Malaitan police and local groups (mainly youths).³ As discussed, the fighting was linked largely to Malaitan-Guadalcanal differences related to issues of cultural respect, perceived inequitable revenue distributions, and Malaitans securing jobs on Guadalcanal. Against this backdrop, the mine continued to operate; however, Guadalcanal leaders increasingly made calls for it to cease operations. In mid 1999, Guadalcanal provincial leaders backed the mine's closure pending review and renegotiation of the mining agreement ('Solomons' Gold

Ridge mine boss vows to continue with operation', Pacific Islands Report, 29 June 1999).⁴ In keeping with the tenor of the 'bona fide demands', such calls were essentially to maximise the benefits from the mine to the people of Guadalcanal. The then Ross Mining managing director, Bertus de Graaf, interpreted this position as not being directed against the mine per se: 'I see it more in the light that they [Guadalcanal leaders] have a fairly big ambit claim on the table, which has Gold Ridge as part of it, but it is not directed at Gold Ridge' ('Solomons' Gold Ridge mine boss vows to continue with operation', Pacific Islands Report, 29 June 1999).



Operations at the mine became progressively more difficult in the latter half of 1999. The road to Gold Ridge from Honiara ran through an area of protracted conflict. Fighting and the mass displacement of settlers in the area had already seen the closure of a large palm-oil operation (Fraenkel, Allen and Brock 2010:64–75). With IFM roadblocks came the necessity to transport expatriate mine workers and various materials to the mine site from Honiara via helicopter (Fraenkel 2004:73).

In late June 1999, a proposed peace settlement was negotiated by former Fijian coup leader and prime minister Sitiveni Rabuka. Signatories to what was dubbed ‘the Honiara Peace Accord’ were the prime minister, the premiers of Guadalcanal and Malaita, and the commanders of the main militant groups. Rabuka met with the Ross Mining managing director, with the former acknowledging the importance of the mine’s continued operation (Fraenkel 2004:73). The eventual text of the accord made reference to the mine: ‘Normal operations should resume at...the Gold Ridge Mine and other industrial establishments bearing in mind their contribution to the national economy’ (Honiara Peace Accord, 28 June 1999, [http://www.spc.int/Coastfish/Countries/solomons/ACCORD.htm:Clause 6\[iii\]](http://www.spc.int/Coastfish/Countries/solomons/ACCORD.htm:Clause 6[iii])).

The hopes for peace were, however, short lived. Fraenkel (2004:71) writes that within days of the signing of the accord, ‘there was a police shoot-out with 15 militants at the Gold Ridge mine’.

Fighting at the mine site between local groups (mainly youths) and police continued into 2000. As discussed, an element of the conflict at the mine site in 1999 and the first half of 2000 was violence inflicted by the (mainly Malaitan) police stationed at the mine against local communities. Nanau (2009:214) gives details of an unverified skirmish around the village of Tuararana (about 10 km from the mine) with, a ‘number of

youths...reportedly killed by government supplied guns fired by police officers’.⁵

In May 2000—purportedly in response to a request from Guadalcanal militants—a police operation was mounted to evacuate Malaitans working at the mine. All Malaitans were transported to Honiara. In addition, Malaitan police officers stationed at the mine were relocated. The northern plains had become a no-go zone for Malaitans.

The coup and the Gold Ridge raid: June 2000

The turning point of the civil conflict, and for the mine, was to occur on 5 June 2000. On that day the main Malaitan militant group, the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF), in a ‘joint operation’ with the police, seized control of the police armory at Rove, Honiara, and placed the prime minister under house arrest. The armory was raided in the early hours of 5 June 2000. According to Guadalcanal militants located at Gold Ridge, they received the order to raid the mine shortly after 10 am (Interview with former Guadalcanal Liberation Front members, Honiara, 15 December 2009).⁶ Before midday, approximately 20 Guadalcanal militants raided Gold Ridge.

The Guadalcanal militants at Gold Ridge were senior commanders and young males, predominantly from the Weather Coast of southern Guadalcanal. Most had kinship affiliations. At the time of the raid on the armory, many of them were living in the Gold Ridge area. Strong ties link the Gold Ridge people with those of the Weather Coast. The Gold Ridge people (the Bahomea) are a sub-tribe of the Malango tribe, who migrated from the Weather Coast to central Guadalcanal before European settlement (Naitoro and Iliescu 1996:6). This is evident in the language (spoken by those around the mine area) which is influenced



by the Talise language of the Weather Coast (Roe and Gorecki 1990:14). Today, the bonds between the two areas are demonstrated by frequent intermigration, facilitated by a trans-island track linking the mine area with the Weather Coast. While there are anecdotal accounts of tension amongst local groups around the Gold Ridge area—including amongst the two main tribal lines—these conflicts are generally not well documented or understood.

The diverse motivations for the raid on the mine are discussed below. Undoubtedly, one of the immediate concerns was the need for Guadalcanal militants to obtain weapons quickly in response to the Malaitan/police ransacking of the Rove armory.⁷ Secondary to this was obtaining other 'lootable' mine items, such as vehicles. The taking of gold was not a motivation for the raid.

There were eight non-Malaitan PPF/RRU officers stationed at the mine site at the time it was raided. Ex-militants maintain that aside from the firing of weapons into the air, the takeover was peaceful with no apparent harm or loss of life. This account is contested by former members of the RRU, who contend that the officers were forced onto the ground, seriously assaulted by the militants and had their high-powered weapons stolen (Interview with former RRU officers, Honiara, 22 January 2010 and 1 April 2010).⁸

Four of the police officers were led away from the mine and into the bush at gunpoint. The precise intent behind this action is unclear. One former officer spoken to was of the belief that they were to be taken to the Weather Coast to be held hostage. Another believed they were being taken away to be murdered. Before the group had advanced far, in an attempted assassination, the officer-in-charge of police at the mine site was seriously wounded by a shot to the leg fired from a high-powered weapon. While the injured officer managed to escape, the

remainder of the group was taken deeper into the bush. Following the intervention of a senior Guadalcanal militant, however, the group was eventually returned to the mine site where they remained awaiting transport to Honiara. Police and expatriate staff were eventually flown to Honiara by helicopter.⁹

Immediately following the raid, in alcohol-fuelled revelry, Guadalcanal militants looted and randomly shot at mine infrastructure and housing. Not surprisingly, the mine's operation was suspended indefinitely. With the mine's closure, community members who had been relocated prior to the mine's operation returned to their home villages.

Post-coup to pre-intervention, June 2000 – July 2003: the rise of 'Satan' and the CNF

The conflict at the mine site took a new turn following the coup. The main militant group to emerge at the mine after June 2000 was known as the Central Neutral Force (CNF). This group was led by Special Constable Stanley ('Satan') Kaoni. Kaoni hailed from Totua Village in the Gold Ridge area. Approximately 30 individuals were part of Kaoni's group—predominantly young men armed mainly with homemade guns. The CNF was typical of the disparate Guadalcanal groups that formed during the conflict, all possessing variable motives, allegiances and degrees of representativeness.

The CNF ransacked the mine site, taking explosives, stealing mine property and intimidating people who lived in the area. They also occupied part of the mine, establishing a makeshift camp.¹⁰ Armed conflict was commonplace. Unlike previous clashes, however, which had largely involved police and local groups, the fighting and harass-



ment following an Australian-sponsored peace process in October 2000—and the signing of the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA)—was characterised by intra-ethnic warfare.

The TPA saw the splintering of Guadalcanal militants, essentially along the lines of those who supported a negotiated peace process and those who did not. The two main Guadalcanal militant groups were the Guadalcanal Liberation Front (GLF), led by Harold Keke, and the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM), led by Andrew Te'e. Although seemingly neutral, the CNF, following the TPA, aligned itself with the latter group. Fighting between the CNF and the GLF around the mine site was common and civilians were frequently targeted. Local villagers (who were often seen to be aligned with one or the other of the militant groups) complained that the CNF was involved in acts of extortion and violence, including the burning of houses (Dorney 2003). Equally, militants aligned with Keke's group were blamed for similar deeds.

Days before the arrival of a regional peacekeeping mission in July 2003—the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI)—Kaoni handed over explosives stolen from the mine to police during a demobilisation ceremony at Gold Ridge. Despite threats to fight it out with RAMSI, Kaoni was arrested and remanded in custody in October 2003 together with five other members of the CNF. Kaoni's arrest and the arrest of other individuals around Gold Ridge saw violence re-emerge in August 2004. About 50 men from the area reportedly carried out retaliatory raids against Kaoni's supporters (Amnesty International 2004:3). Thirty homes along the Metapona River were said to have been looted and destroyed. Villagers were allegedly subjected to harassment and torture.

The Central Magistrate's Court in Honiara sentenced Kaoni in September 2005 for numerous offences around the mine area dating from 2001, including robbery and abduction. Having already spent close to three years in prison awaiting his hearing, Kaoni was released shortly after being sentenced.¹¹ Kaoni is currently residing in the Gold Ridge area and is reportedly still the target of anger from some sections of the Gold Ridge community (Interview with ex-Guadalcanal militants, Honiara, 15 December 2009).

Greed, grievance, curse? The Gold Ridge mine and the conflict

It has been suggested that the conflict around Gold Ridge was not connected to the presence or operation of the mine *per se*. Thus, Tagini (2007:339) writes that '[a]lthough the nascent mining operation might have fuelled sentiments, it does not appear to have had any direct link to the onset of the war'.

There are two rationales for the raiding of the mine: the securing of weapons and other items for the purposes of advancing the civil war; and what can broadly be described as ideological opposition to resource extraction, particularly goldmining. Former militants involved in the raid who were spoken to for this article tended to justify their involvement in terms of the latter.¹² This explanation places the mine as a central source of conflict.

Allen (2007:141) discusses the ideological-opposition motif. While there was strong conviction amongst Guadalcanal militants that government revenue generated from the mine would be used to fund the continued operations of the MEF (presumably through the police) and, more broadly, would not be used for the benefit of Guadalcanal,¹³ there also existed deeper historical narratives concerning the exploitation of Guadalcanal resources by outsiders.



Various common themes emerge from discussions with Guadalcanal ex-militants around resource development on their island. Allen (2007:138) writes

The texts of my interviews with both Guale [Guadalcanal] ex-militants and non-combatants are peppered with the words 'not fair', 'unfair', 'resources', 'the government' and 'development'. The Guales strongly believe that it is unfair that their province provides a significant amount of revenue to the national economy from resource developments such as [the] Gold Ridge mine, the oil palm plantations and commercial logging, but receives proportionately much less from the national government in terms of grants and disbursements.¹⁴

Gold has been a central theme in historical articulations of resistance to colonial rule and the exploitation of Guadalcanal resources. Grievances around goldmining activities can be traced to the agrarian philosophy of the Gaena'alu Movement (formerly the Moro Movement—a Guadalcanal custom-based socio-political movement originating on the Weather Coast in the 1950s). Large-scale resource extraction is seen as being at odds with the movement's philosophy of protecting and preserving the environment (Allen 2007:140).

Guadalcanal leaders and militants have resisted the nature of the operation at Gold Ridge. Allen (2007:140) quotes Sabino, the Gaena'alu Movement's current president:

Gold Ridge mine is a development which is too big. It's a major development. Okay. The movement, we think that this kind of development should not operate in the way that it is currently doing so.

Another account details disappointment directed at Gold Ridge landowning groups for 'selling' the 'movement's gold'

to foreigners (McDonald 2003:88).

Much of what unfolded at Gold Ridge accords with analyses of natural-resource conflict within Melanesia and shares parallels with similar disputes in Papua New Guinea (for example, Banks 2005, 2008; Haley and May 2007). Resource-related grievance rather than greed *per se* provides a key explanation for the raid on the mine. A feature of this was the relative deprivation of the Weather Coast, where most of the Guadalcanal militants hailed from (see also Allen and Dinnen 2010:308–9). (As discussed, strong ties link the Gold Ridge and Weather Coast peoples.) Conflict associated with resource development in Melanesia has been attributed to the failure of the State to provide basic services (Haley and May 2007:13). Guadalcanal ex-militants involved in raiding the mine expressed concern at benefits not being used to further the development of their island. The Weather Coast region is severely underdeveloped and inhabitants have long expressed discontent at the manifest inequalities; why have so many 'other' people benefited from the land and resources of 'their' islands while they languish in relative disadvantage (Personal communication, Matthew Allen, 19 April 2010)?¹⁵

Assaults on the mine and questioning of the ownership of the land on which the mine was sited were to provide an avenue through which Guadalcanal militants articulated their grievances. As the conflict progressed, however, a low-level, internecine war—seemingly unconnected to the mine—evolved. Blatant and opportunistic criminality became the *modus operandi* of the groups involved.

While ideological issues are key in explaining resistance to the mine's operation, two further factors are relevant. First, there is no doubt that the presence of the mine caused resentment amongst portions of the local populace. Settlement



around the mine site was almost entirely a result of small-scale alluvial mining, with subsistence gardening (and other economic activities) largely non-existent prior to the mine's establishment (Naitoro and Iliescu 1996:13). Moore (2004:85) states that locals were 'severely disgruntled' at being unable to continue their gold panning when land was leased to Ross Mining. Likewise, Brown (2003) maintains—perhaps somewhat romantically—that landowners who used to 'grow rich' on 'subsistence gold mining' were suddenly unable to continue their activities.¹⁶

Second, as discussed, was the presence of a large number of Malaitans, both those working at the mine site and their extended families. Malaitan presence on Guadalcanal was to be a key source of conflict, especially as hostilities progressed. Banks (2005:189) has contended that migration is 'perhaps the most devastating of all the effects of large-scale mining in Melanesia'. A perceived lack of cultural respect and challenges to local identity and landholding fostered resentment. One ex-militant spoken to suggested that Malaitan presence at Gold Ridge was one of several key reasons behind the raid on the mine, with local landowners questioning why 'outsiders' were needed to do work that they could do (Interview with informant, Honiara, 1 April 2010).

Government response

The Guadalcanal Provincial Government has given mixed messages about the mine's operation. In 2005, repeating previous calls, the then premier opposed the mine's reopening ('Solomons' Gold Ridge mine boss vows to continue with operation', *Pacific Islands Report*, 29 June 1999). In the same year, the Balasuna Leaders' Summit—a gathering of about 120 Guadalcanal leaders on Guadalcanal's northern plains—was held. This

was the first meeting of Guadalcanal leaders following the civil unrest. The summit *communiqué* stated that the mine would reopen only after further negotiations of the mining agreement between landowners, the province and the company. It also made reference to a requirement of 'acceptable reconciliations and rehabilitations' (Report of the Leaders' Summit 2005:39).

A year later—perhaps resigned to the mine's presence—the then Guadalcanal premier complained about slow progress being made at the mine site

There's a lot of gold out there. You don't need to do prospecting now. That's the only thing, that they [new owner Australia Solomon Gold Limited] are gaining time for something. And we'll find out. We are taking steps, we don't want any more prospecting to be done there. Either they start mining now or leave the prospecting and give a chance to some company who maybe have the money to do the mining. ('Guadalcanal premier gives ultimatum to gold miner—start operating or leave', *Radio New Zealand International*, 10 August 2006)

Come 2010—and with the imminent reopening of the mine by a new owner, Allied Gold Limited—the current Guadalcanal premier is supportive of the mine's operation (Personal communication, Stephen Panga, Premier of Guadalcanal Province, Honiara, 30 March 2010). Similarly, the national government is also behind the mine's reopening.

Addressing the grievances

The grievances outlined above are based on various seemingly intractable positions: perceptions of the funding of a federal nation-state versus perceptions of localised economic interests (and the related law in



Solomon Islands that mineral resources belong to *all* of the people and the government and that the government has the exclusive right to develop such resources as it deems to be in the national interest) (*Mines and Minerals Act* [CAP 42] ss 2[1] and 2[3]); the desire for economic growth versus concerns about the various social, environmental and economic effects of 'major' development; and historical articulations of resistance to perceived outsider 'exploitation' of resources versus limited local capability (both technical and financial) to carry out mineral-resource projects.

The degree to which the above issues can be reconciled is questionable. Some views seem to be based on a misconstrued understanding of the role of national government and the arrangements as concerns Gold Ridge benefit payments, and different ideas about what 'development' is and how it is best achieved. There also appears to be a steadfast refusal to recognise government legitimacy in the context of strong customary authority. In this regard, Naitoro (2000:141) states that

[c]ustomary landowners cannot and have never accepted the policy of state ownership of minerals and this in itself is an obstacle to future mineral resources development.

In the case of Gold Ridge, the government has determined that it will not retain all royalties for *all* of the people of Solomon Islands, but will pass some of the benefits directly to the various Gold Ridge landowning groups. Royalty payments are channelled through the Department of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification. Accordingly, the department acts as an intermediary, receiving money from the mine and distributing it to the various tribes on the basis of agreed percentages. According to the government, their role in the royalty distribution process does not create

any tension amongst landowners and is a straightforward process (Personnel communication, Donn H. Tolia, Acting Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification, Honiara, 21 July 2010). The chairman and chief executive of Allied Gold, Mark Caruso, however, sees things differently, believing that 'the problem is that the money has to go first to government, then back to the people' (Callick 2010). Both the former acting permanent secretary of the department and Walton Naezon, a former minister for mines and energy, believe that government involvement in royalty distribution is an important check, ensuring that the correct royalties are paid by the mine (Personal communication, Walter Naezon, Honiara, 28 July 2010).

A process of constitutional reform is currently under way in Solomon Islands. A draft federal constitution has been prepared (*Draft Federal Constitution of Solomon Islands*, June 2009, <http://www.sicr.gov.sb/>). Under the proposed arrangements, minerals will no longer *de jure* belong to the people and the government. Instead, control and ownership of minerals will rest in the hands of indigenous tribes/clans. It is unclear what role the national government is intended to play in the royalty distribution process. The pace at which constitutional reforms will be implemented is unclear and it is unlikely that any major initiatives will take place in the short term.

Today, one of the key grievances relates to the environmental effects of the mine. Run-off from the tailings dam into the Metapona River has been a constant source of concern for communities downstream of the mine. River water is used for bathing, washing, cooking and irrigation. As was the case immediately prior to the initial opening of the mine (Moore 2004:86), today, communities remain fearful of possible cyanide poisoning and have recently complained of skin irritation following exposure to river water.



The power of downstream communities was recognised in a sociological impact study commissioned by the mine's former owners prior to the mine's establishment (Naitoro and Iliescu 1996:27):

These down stream villages are part of the Gold Ridge people and are able to exert forces on the project if they are left out of the decision making process.

Concerns from downstream communities eventually saw the formation of the Metapona Downstream Association, which sought compensation for the environmental damage it said had been caused by the mine. Three separate legal cases against the mine were filed in the High Court of Solomon Islands in 1997—one of which raised the issue of dangerous discharges into the river. Ultimately, the litigation was unsuccessful, with the plaintiffs unable to establish that the mine operations would cause 'imminent and substantial damage to...[their] property, business or livelihood' (*Saki and Others v Ross Mining [Solomon Islands] Limited and Others*, Civil Case No. 169 of 2007, per Palmer J.).

The degree to which present environmental concerns are real or otherwise is to some extent a moot point, with community perceptions being key. Reassurances by Allied Gold have not allayed the fears of sections of some downstream communities, such as Pitukoli and Tuararana, and the company faces the threat of roadblocks from aggrieved villagers.

Conclusion

Gold Ridge features prominently in Solomon Islands' near-term efforts to foster economic growth, especially following the anticipated decline in commercial forestry. Prior to the current PNG liquefied natural gas project, it was said that Gold Ridge—while no larger

than the smallest of the four major mining operations in Papua New Guinea—would contribute as much to the Solomon Islands economy as the mining and petroleum sectors contribute to the PNG economy (Filer and McIntyre 2006:219).

Following an investment of approximately A\$150 million by Allied Gold, Gold Ridge's first pour is scheduled for the first half of 2011 (Mamu 2010:10; see also Allied Gold Limited 2010b:6). Allied is reporting that about 500 local jobs will be created when the mine is operational (Letzutini 2010:3). Moreover, the company has recently lodged an exploration permit for an additional 129 sq km around the mine area (Allied Gold Limited 2010a).

The existing royalty distribution arrangements will remain under the mine's new owners, with the same allocations and royalties continuing to be channelled through the Department of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification. National government revenue will be principally in the form of export duties, a corporate tax of 30 per cent (expected to become payable during the fourth year of operations) and a 15 per cent goods tax on consumables and fuel. It is likely to take some years following the recommencement of production before any significant tax revenues are realised.

If the words of former Guadalcanal militants are to be believed, tensions still run high around resource extraction on Guadalcanal, including the Gold Ridge mine. Continuing concerns about landownership and sub-national and national government arrangements are yet to be addressed. The extent to which development takes place outside Honiara is a live issue, although little seems to have occurred to date and the Weather Coast remains one of the most impoverished areas in Solomon Islands. A government-organised and sanctioned reconciliation ceremony in Vulolo Ward, where the mine is located, is yet to occur, which is



apparently a cause of concern amongst some community members. Also, in the absence of state introduced forgiveness legislation, the current Minister for Fisheries and Marine Resources, and former MEF Commander, has foreshadowed payback against the mine by sections of local communities owing to the selective incarceration of their relatives (Jimmy Lusibaea interviewed in Braithwaite et al, 2010:89).

In order to lower the potential for future conflict, the environmental, social and economic impacts of the Gold Ridge mine will need to be carefully managed and monitored. The near-term security of Solomon Islands, and the Gold Ridge mine, is linked to the continued presence of RAMSI. In a statement unlikely to inspire confidence, Mark Caruso, the chairman and chief executive of Allied Gold, provides tacit acknowledgment of the less than ideal security situation in Solomon Islands. In recent comments to an Australian newspaper, he remarked that in the advent of trouble it helps to be a 'couple of hours' flight away from Australia' (Callick 2010).

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Notes

¹ The Gold Ridge mine is located on central Guadalcanal, approximately 40 km southeast of Honiara (see Figure 1). During the con-

flict, the mine was owned by an Australian company, Ross Mining NL Limited. In May 2000, the mine was taken over by another Australian miner, Delta Gold. The mine is currently owned by Allied Gold Limited—also an Australian company.

- ² Moore (2004:104) states that many senior staff at the mine, including engineers and chemists, were from Malaita.
- ³ In February 2000, the newsletter of the Isatabu Freedom Movement reported incidents of harassment of local villages around the mine by PPF officers ('Police officers harass villagers', *Isatabu Tavuli*, 1[2][18 February 2000]:1).
- ⁴ This contrasts with the picture being painted by Ross Mining, which—most likely in an effort to soothe worried investors—maintained that about this time the national government, provincial government and local communities continued to support the operation of the mine (Lyday 1999).
- ⁵ Clashes with police would eventually lead local landowners to demand compensation from the government for lives lost.
- ⁶ At least one media report predating the raid details a threat by Guadalcanal 'rebels' to close the mine (Elder 2000).
- ⁷ Approximately 12 weapons were stolen from police stationed at the mine. This roughly accords with Moore's (2004:188) observation that, come 2003, it was 'well known' that Harold Keke had 12 high-powered weapons stolen from Gold Ridge and police posts around Guadalcanal.
- ⁸ Pursuant to an agreement with the Guadalcanal militants, the police stationed at Gold Ridge kept their weapons in their rooms at the mine site.
- ⁹ This accords with media reports. Some 125 people, including foreign nationals, were transported from the mine site to Honiara via helicopter ('Solomons' Gold Ridge mine boss vows to continue with operation', *Pacific Islands Report*, 29 June 1999).
- ¹⁰ Interestingly, in November 2000, a member of the CNF sought compensation from the mine for 'guarding' it during the period of civil conflict ('Army asked to help return Bougainvilleans from Solomons', *Pacific Islands Report*, 24 November 2000).



- ¹¹ Court file, Central Magistrate's Court, Honiara (inspected on 26 March 2010). As of March 2004, there were said to be at least 30 police files outstanding for offences allegedly committed by members of the CNF around the Gold Ridge area. Ultimately, however, much less than this number were to be convicted for their actions: see Kabui J., *Tara v Regina*, unreported, High Court of Solomon Islands, 19 March 2004 (available from <http://www.paclii.org/sb/cases/SBHC/2004/25.html>, accessed 22 March 2010).
- ¹² An area of contestation is the degree to which ex-militants acted on their own devices or were manipulated by certain individuals largely for reasons of personal gain. There is also a question as to what extent ex-militants have attempted to explain their various criminal actions as furthering a justified cause.
- ¹³ This was the view put in an interview with ex-Guadalcanal militants, Honiara, 15 December 2009.
- ¹⁴ There are no publicly available figures detailing the extent to which Guadalcanal Province contributes to national revenues. Further, at the time of the civil conflict, the arrangements for the allocation of provincial grants by the national government were not well understood. Cox and Morrison (2004:20) stated that '[t]he formula and process to determine... the total provincial grants is not known and cannot be explained by Provincial staff or the DPG&CD [Department of Provincial Government and Constituency Development]'. There has historically been no correlation between province size and the amount of national government funding provided, with large variations in provincial grant funding per capita between provinces.
- ¹⁵ On the deprivation of the Weather Coast, see Tara (1990).
- ¹⁶ There are no records detailing gold production through panning, making it difficult to determine exact production levels and revenue. Most gold obtained through this means was sold to Chinese buyers. The only records available are those for legal gold exports (Naitoro and Iliescu 1996:13); however, one report puts gold production 'sold to the bank' through panning at 25 kg between 1994 and 1997 (Thompson 2007:5).

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